

HUMANITARIAN CONTRIBUTIONS

MEDICO SOCIAL-LIFE CHANGING ENDEAVORS

It is a gift and a fresh start for the under privileged and socially deprived class of people to whom services are being offered through plastic and reconstructive micro-surgery particularly to the people in country like India.

It was just by chance that I was undergoing training at a hospital affiliated to the Oxford University and he was travelling with Mr. Bruce Bellay to one of the peripheral center affiliated to the Stoke Mandeville Hospital for surgery session and impulsively I asked him why in a country like United Kingdom, where everybody has enough means to travel, you are travelling out of your hospital going to a remote / peripheral center and performing surgery which otherwise could have been done in a hospital where you are more comfortable.

He said, “No Ashok”, if all the 10 people I'll be operating, had to travel to Oxford University Hospital, along with these patients, there will be another 3 relatives / friends. They have to come and go back, so it means at least 35 to 40 people have to travel from their places to the Oxford University and going back. On the other hand, if you and me travel and operate then only two of we will have to travel and they will be staying in their own place. So, there is a big saving and at the same time there is a big comfort for their family.

At that time I realized that these types of centers and services are needed more in the country like India rather than in a country like United Kingdom. On my return to India, I had made it a mission to explore the possibilities of undertaking these types of remote surgical sessions. My philosophy had been to look after those who allow me to learn on them. As a trainee, when I used to operate on patients at the medical college, these patients never asked me, “doctor do you know how to perform surgery?” They had full faith in the system and in the doctors and they allowed us to perform surgery and at the same time they allowed us to learn surgery.

I always feel obliged to these people and want to give back to them certain benefits of my surgical skills. With this vision I started going back to the under-privileged and tribal belt in the country selecting out some of the centers which have the infrastructure, facilities and more than that they have a willingness to serve the people. I am really grateful to my teachers who gave me ideas and inspiration to perform charitable, social and community work.

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My first interaction and inclination to the charity work started when I was a third year medical student, we had just joined the clinical side of the medical education and our professor of surgery said that, “Young boys what can you do for the patients”. I responded; “we are just studying tell me what can I do?” He suggested why not donate something for leprosy patients and 2nd October which happened to be the International Leprosy Day would be an ideal gift for them. As a person with a limited means I thought if I donate Rs. 100 or 200 from my personal savings, it is of no use. However, If I collect one pair of clothes from my colleagues and friends and make due repairs and then donate, it would be definitely useful for them. Thanks to my mother who in my early days taught me how to stitch. I collected old pairs of pajamas and shirts from all my colleagues by personally going to their homes and hostel. I then stitched some of these torn clothes, washed and ironed and then distributed 200 pairs of these clothes to the leprosy patients on the leprosy day. While I was doing the stitching by myself, two of the pajamas and one of the shirts had money, a gold chain and a gold ring. I thought if I had not learned how to do sewing, probably I would have given this job to some tailor and in this process they would have lost those valuable things, which I found doing the job myself.

I am so fortunate that despite coming from an average middle class family, not so famous medical college and a background where we had difficulties in pursuing higher education, I could receive the highest education in the world. I could get the best of the training in the world at countries like United Kingdom, Japan and United States. I was not lured by the facilities and the luxuries of the these nations and always wanted to come back to own country and serve people who helped me mature as a Surgeon, give back the higher education and help Nation building.

My grandfather was very fond of me and he had a dream to see me excelling as a physician and I feel I made his dream come true. I must also thank my teachers and patients' Family who actually allowed me to reach out to the people and helping them with the skill that I have acquired. I am thankful to the Government Medical College, Nagpur and Grant Medical College in Bombay, which allowed me to mature as a plastic surgeon first and as a specialized micro-surgeon later. I am also obliged to centers of excellence at Hospital at Japan, United Kingdom and the United States of America, which also allowed me to have outstanding specialized training in reconstructive micro-surgery, under Dr. Julia Terzis, Mr. Bruce Bailey, Mr. J S P Wilson and Dr, K. Harii.